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AUTHOR Clagett, Craig A.
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ABSTRACT

In fall 1985, Prince George's Community College (PGCC) added two questions to its registration form to gather information about student goals. The questions asked for the student's primary reason for attending the college (e.g., prepare for new job/career, update skills for current job/career, prepare for transfer, explore academic or occupational areas, or personal enrichment) and his/her immediate educational goal (e.g., associate degree, occupational certificate, or courses only). The college's total credit and noncredit headcount was segmented into five groups defined by their primary goal in attending college. The groups were: (1) job seekers, who made up 20% of the total student body and who were enrolled both in highly structured curricula, such as nursing, and in computer programming and word processing courses; (2) job upgraders, making up 18% of the student population, who were mainly adults employed during the day and enrolled part-time in evening, credit or noncredit classes; (3) transfer preparers, who represented 19% of the students and who included recent high school graduates, aspiring working adults, and students enrolled in vocational curricula; (4) personal enrichers, comprising 30% of the total enrollment, who took mostly noncredit courses or credit courses in art, music, or physical education; and (5) explorers, who constituted 13% of PGCC's headcount and who most frequently selected general studies courses to explore their educational or career goals. This breakdown of student goals has applications for marketing efforts and helps explain why PGCC, which serves nearly 38,000 students per year in credit and noncredit courses, only produces 1,000 graduates per year. (AYC)

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A GOAL TYPOLOGY FOR STUDENT OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

presented by
Craig A. Clagett

Director of Institutional Research and Analysis
Prince George's Community College
Largo, Maryland 20772

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A GOAL TYPOLOGY FOR STUDENT OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

Craig A. Clagett
Director of Institutional Research and Analysis
Prince George's Community College
Largo, Maryland 20772

Public concern about educational outcomes, espoused by elected officials and mandated in state laws, plus declines in traditional sources of students have colleges scrambling to both demonstrate their effectiveness and attract more students. The two concerns--though often carried on independently--are easily linked. Findings from assessment can be used to inform marketing efforts. Analysis of student outcomes data can supply useful marketing research insights. In addition, student outcomes information can be published in a widely distributed "report to the community" that will serve public relations as well as accountability purposes. This presentation examines one scheme for identifying student goals in attending college--an essential first step for both student outcomes accountability reporting and for effective market segmentation.

Assessing Student Outcomes

Students attend community colleges for many different reasons. In designing assessment studies, it is essential that the criteria for measuring student success reflect student goals in attending college. **A relatively small minority of all the students enrolled at many community colleges are pursuing the Associate's Degree.** For example, less than half of the credit

students beginning college at Prince George's Community College in Maryland in fall 1987 intended to earn the A.A. degree. Over a third of the students planned to transfer to a four-year school without earning the A.A. first. One in ten were working toward an occupational certificate and immediate employment. Another twelve percent were taking specific courses and had no degree intentions. When the noncredit students are included in total enrollment counts, the degree-seeking proportion is further reduced. Assessment studies that look exclusively at "graduation rates" are obviously misguided. **Student outcome assessment must take student goals into account.**

A Side Benefit: Market Segmentation Applications

Most community colleges offer courses and programs meeting student needs "from the womb to the tomb." Market segmentation rests on the assumption that the college's service population has diverse and varied needs. The implication is that both products and promotional appeals should be designed to meet the needs of distinct segments of the college's total market. Among the most common approaches to segmentation are geographic, demographic, psychographic, and behavioral (Kotler and Fox, 1985). **Geographic** segmentation assumes that where people live may be related to their needs and preferences, and can be based on jurisdictional size and density as well as location. **Demographic** segmentation

is most common, since demographic variables are often associated with customer needs and preferences, are easily measured with data usually readily available, and are frequently the link for determining what media to choose for communications. In addition to the obvious age, sex, and race classifications, demographic segments can reflect life cycle and household structure variables. **Psychographic** segmentation differentiates a population by social class, attitudes, lifestyle, or personality characteristics. Lastly, **behavioral** segmentation divides consumers into groups according to how they respond to actual opportunities: what they are looking for in a product or service, the frequency and volume of their usage, how ready they are to act. The student goal analysis advocated here is a type of behavioral segmentation. It differentiated among student reasons for attending college, and identified patterns in enrollment and demographics associated with each goal-defined group.

A Community College Student Goal Typology

To gather student goal data for all students attending the college, in fall 1985 Prince George's Community College added two questions to its registration form. A preliminary analysis of these data (Clagett, 1985) suggested they would be a valuable addition to the college's student profile dataset. Last year,

these questions were made "required fields" on the on-line registration screen to ensure data collection. The questions asked about the student's primary reason for attending the college (prepare for new job/career, update skills for current job/career, prepare for transfer, explore academic or occupational areas, personal enrichment) and immediate educational goal (A.A. degree, occupational certificate, courses only).

The student goal analysis included credit and noncredit students. In 1987-88, for the second consecutive year, more individuals enrolled in noncredit courses at the college than credit courses:

Total Unduplicated Student Headcount

	1986-87	1987-88
Noncredit classes only	17,852	18,869
Credit classes only	17,527	17,599
Both credit and noncredit	1,167	1,337
TOTAL HEADCOUNT	36,546	37,805

While credit courses generated over two-thirds of collegewide FTEs, the fact that more students attended the college in a noncredit capacity was a reality the goal analysis would reinforce in the minds of top administrators.

The college's total headcount was segmented into five groups defined by their primary goal in attending the community college. The five groups were job seekers, job upgraders, transfer preparers, explorers, and personal enrichers. Job concerns motivated two of every five students, either preparing for a new job or career or upgrading skills for a currently-held position. Personal enrichment was the next most common reason. This was largely a reflection of expanding senior citizens programming; three-fourths of the seniors identified enrichment as their primary reason in attending. (Students age 60 and above accounted for nearly a third of all noncredit students at the college.) Only a fifth of the students were preparing for transfer to a four-year college or university. The remaining 13 percent were exploring academic or occupational options. The percentage distribution by goal for the total student body was as follows:

Student Goal Typology
Percentage Distribution

Personal enrichers	30%
Job seekers	20%
Transfer preparers	19%
Job upgraders	18%
Explorers	13%

Students with job-related goals were almost as likely to be in noncredit as credit courses. Nearly two of three students preparing for a new job or career were credit students, but three-fifths of the job skill upgraders were enrolled in noncredit courses. As expected, almost all of the transfer preparers were credit students, but credit students were also well represented among the explorers and enrichers as well.

To get a better understanding of the five segments, student enrollment patterns were reviewed for each group. The five goal-defined segments differed as follows:

Job Seekers: This fifth of the college's total student body is enrolled primarily to prepare for a new or different career. Some, such as those enrolled in the highly structured nursing and allied health curricula, have a high probability of graduating from the community college. Others, such as many taking courses in computer programming or word processing, may be tempted to leave school for the first good job offer. The typical job seeker is in his or her early twenties, though women in their thirties and forties returning to the workforce are also represented in this group. There is no dominant attendance pattern for this diverse group.

Job Upgraders: These students want to improve their skills for their current job, perhaps to qualify for a promotion. They are mainly adults employed during the day, taking classes part-time in the evening. Computer and business management courses, noncredit as well as credit, are popular among this segment. Growth in noncredit contract training has also increased the number of community college students in this category.

Transfer Preparers: Students planning to transfer to complete a bachelor's degree are a varied group. They include the recent high school graduate, attending full-time on-campus during the day, and the aspiring working adult, primarily a part-time evening student frequently enrolled at an off-campus extension center. Finally, there are students enrolled in technical, occupationally-oriented curricula who nevertheless express transfer plans. At Prince George's Community College, five programs accounted for almost all of the transfer students: General Studies, Business Administration, Engineering, Information Systems, and Teacher Education. Overall, two-thirds will transfer without completing their Associate's degree.

Enrichers: Four of five students attending for personal enrichment reasons were enrolled in noncredit

courses. Senior citizens accounted for half of the enrichers enrolled at Prince George's. Credit courses with substantial proportions of enrichment students included Art, Music, and Physical Education.

Explorers: Students unsure of their educational or career goals constituted 13 percent of Prince George's total annual headcount. They were somewhat more likely to use noncredit courses than credit for their exploration of academic and job options. Those in credit programs most frequently selected General Studies, though some were exploring specific subject areas such as computer programming or paralegal studies.

Conclusion: Knowing Your Student Body

Knowledge of student goals helped explain why an institution serving nearly 38,000 students annually (in credit and noncredit courses) produced only a thousand graduates a year. But the thorough look at student reasons in attending had an even greater impact. Many administrators and faculty, products of conventional senior institutions and introduced to "junior colleges" when they almost exclusively served as the first half of the baccalaureate, understood for the first time how dramatic

the change had been in their college's student body. The college had become a comprehensive "community learning center" where most students were not seeking a college degree. This reality requires care in administration and assessment. State officials must be educated as to the true mission and current reality of community college operations. Only then can meaningful assessment efforts be conducted and accepted. To meet state-mandated accountability reporting requirements, Maryland community colleges have recently completed their first statewide study of continuing education outcomes. Community colleges must be ready to accurately describe who their students are and what they are achieving by attending.

References

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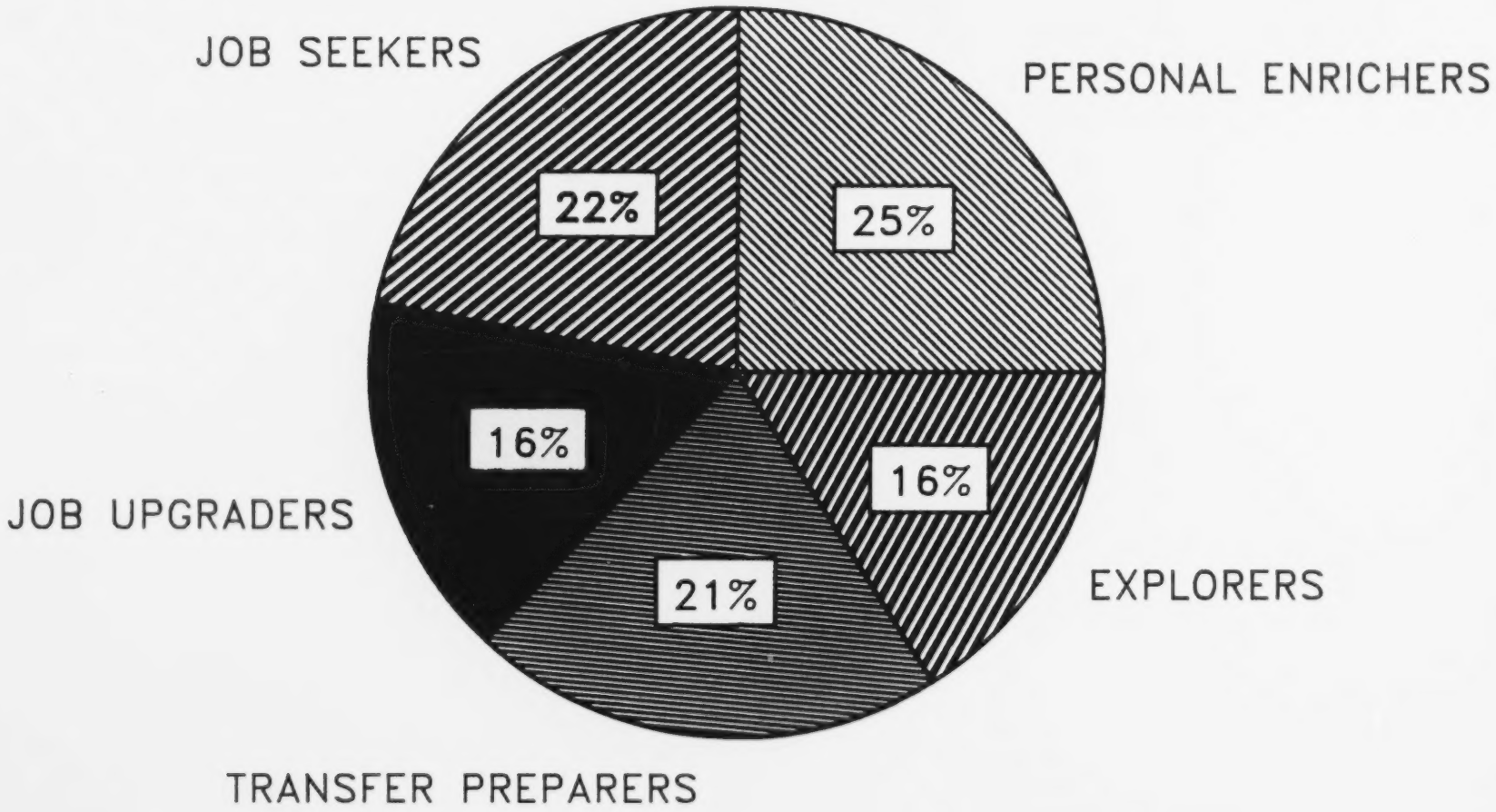
Table 1

STUDENT GOAL SEGMENTATION TYPOLOGY

	Headcount Credit	Headcount Noncredit	Typical Attendance Pattern	Typical Program Choices	Typical Source Population
JOB SEEKERS	4,700	2,500	full- and part-time, day & evening, on campus	Nursing, Allied Health, Computer Programming, Business Management, Computer Service Tech., Paralegal/Legal Asst.	men and women in early 20s, returning women
JOB UPGRADERS	2,500	4,000	part-time, evening, on & off campus	Business Management, Computer Management, Accounting, Word Proc./Office Admin., Nonmatriculated	working adults, age 25-45
TRANSFER PREPARERS	6,800	100	full-time, day, on campus (part-time, eve, off-campus)	General Studies, Business Administration, Engineering, Information Systems, Teacher Education	recent high school grads (employed adults)
ENRICHERS	2,200	8,600	part-time, day & evening, on & off campus	Nonmatriculated, Art, Music, Physical Education	women, age 35-70
EXPLORERS	1,800	2,800	part-time, day & evening, on & off campus	Nonmatriculated, General Studies, Marketing, Computer Programming, Paralegal/Legal Asst.	women in their 30s

PGCC ENROLLMENT BY STUDENT GOAL

CREDIT AND NONCREDIT, 1985



PGCC ENROLLMENT BY STUDENT GOAL

CREDIT AND NONCREDIT, 1985

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